Cendrillon

There was once a gentleman who got married for a second to time, and to a woman who was the haughtiest and proudest woman you could ever imagine. She had two daughters of the same disposition, who took after her in all things. The gentleman had a daughter of his own, but who was very kind and good. She took after her mother, who was the best woman in the whole world.

Hardly had the gentleman married his new wife than she started to show her true colours. She could not bear the good qualities of this young woman, who showed up her own daughters as being detestable. She gave her the most vile jobs in the house. It was her who cleaned the dished and washed the steps, who scrubbed madam’s bedchamber, and those of her daughters. She even had to sleep right at the top of the house, in a loft on a dirty straw bed, while her step-sisters slept in bedroom with fine flooring, sumptuous beds, and had mirrors where they could see themselves from head to toe.

The poor child suffered it all with patience. She didn’t dare complain to her father, who would have scolded her, because he was ruled entirely by his wife.

When her work was done, she sat in the corner of the room, by the chimney, amongst the cinders. This gave rise to a cruel name in the whole household - cinderarse. Her younger sister, who wasn’t as cruel as the rest of them, just called her Cendrillon (cinders). However, Cendrillon, even with her filthy habits, was a hundred times more beautiful than her sisters, although they were always dressed in magnificent clothes.

One day, the king’s son gave a ball, and invited all people of high quality: the two step-sisters were also invited to it, because they were “big noises” in the country. They set about getting ready, busying themselves with their dresses and deciding which hairstyles would suit them best. More chores for Cendrillon, because it was she who had to run around after them, taking up hemlines and sewing collars and cuffs. They spoke of nothing else but how they were going to look.

“I”, said the eldest, “shall wear my red velvet dress, done with English trimming.

“I, “ said the youngest, “Shall only have an plain skirt, but I shall wear my gold embroidered overcoat, and a diamond tiara, which is bound to get noticed.”

They sent for the best hairdresser, to arrange their hair and accessories. They called Cendrillon, and asked her what she thought, because she had good taste. Cendrillon would offer them the best advice in the world, and even offered her services to the hairdresser. It was the hairdresser who asked Cendrillon, “Will you be going to the ball?”

“Ah, I think you’re making fun of me. They don’t want the likes of me there.”

“You’re right. Everyone would laugh if they saw a Cinder Arse at the ball.”

Someone other than Cendrillon would have taken this as an insult. But the hairdresser was the best, and done her job perfectly.

So filled with joy were the two step-sisters that they didn’t eat for two days. They snapped more than 12 corset laces trying to squeeze their waists to the smallest size possible, and they were always in front of the mirror.

Finally, the big day arrived, and the sisters left for the ball. Cendrillon followed them with her eyes for as long as possible. When she could no longer see them, she burst into tears. Her godmother, who saw her tears, asked her why she was crying.

“I would have liked … I would have liked … “ And she started crying again, so strongly that she couldn’t finish.

Her godmother, who knew a few spells, said to her, “You’d like to go the ball, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes,” said Cendrillon, sniffing.

“Well,” said the godmother, “if you’re a good girl, I’ll get you there.”

She led her to her room and said, “Go into the garden and get me a pumpkin.”

Cendrillon went straight away, and picked the best pumpkin she could find. She brought it back to her godmother, not being able to see how this pumpkin would get her to the ball. Her godmother hollowed it out, leaving only the peel. She tapped it with her wand, and it changed into a beautiful golden carriage.

Next she looked into the mouse trap, where she found six mice, all still alive. She asked Cendrillon to release the trap a little, and when the six mice came out tapped each of them with her wand. And they soon turned into beautiful horses, making a great team out of six dapple-grey mice. As they were going to all this trouble, they might as well make a coachman. “I will see,” said Cendrillon, “if we have a rat in the rat trap. He’ll make a great coachman.”

“You’re right,” said her godmother. “Go and see.”

Cendrillon brought back the rat trap, where they found three big rats. Her godmother choose one of them for his superior beard, and turned him into a fat coachman, and he had the best moustache they’d ever seen. Then she said,

“Go into the garden. You’ll find six lizards behind the watering can. Bring them to me.”

No sooner had she brought them back than her godmother changed them into six lackeys, who took up position behind the carriage in their fine clothes, and who clung to each other, never having done anything else in their entire lives.

Her godmother said the Cendrillon, “Well, when you go to the ball, you’ll go in style, hey?”

“Yes, but shall I go there in my filthy clothes?”

Her godmother had only to touch her clothes and they turned into clothes of gold and silver, shimmering with precious stones. Next she gave her a pair of glass slippers, the prettiest in the whole world.

When she was all ready, Cendrillon climbed into her carriage. But her godmother ordered her to return before midnight, warning her that if she stayed at the ball a moment longer the carriage would turn back into a pumpkin, the horses back into mice, the coachman back into a rat, and the lackeys back into lizards, and her new clothes would turn back into her former rags.

Cendrillon promised her godmother that she would be back before midnight. She left, feeling nothing but joy.

The king’s son, when someone tipped him off that a great princess had arrived that no one knew, went out to greet her. He took her hand as she stepped down from the carriage, and lead her into the dance hall where the revellers gathered. A great silence descended; people stopped dancing, and the violins stopped playing, all to witness this great beauty who has suddenly arrived. Everybody started murmuring at once, “Ah, how beautiful she is!”

Even the king, as old as he was, couldn’t take his eyes off her, and whispered to the queen that it was a long time since he’d seen such a stunner as this. All the women were studying her hair and her clothes, so that the next day they too could look like her, provided they could find such materials, and such skilled workers.

The prince placed her at the head of the table, and led her onto the dance floor. She danced with such grace that they admired her even more.

They brought in great many beautiful snacks, which the prince couldn’t eat, so taken was he with admiring her. She sat down next to her sisters, and bade them a thousand pardons. She gave them a few segments of the oranges and lemons given to her by the prince. This astonished the sisters because they didn’t know her.

While they were chatting away, Cendrillon heard the bell chime out for 11 45. She made her excuses to the entire company and left immediately.

As soon as she arrived back home, she found her godmother and said that she wished she could go to the ball again tomorrow, because the prince had begged her to. As she was telling her godmother everything that had happened, her two sisters banged on the door.

Cendrillon opened the door for them. “You’ve been gone a long time,” she said to them, yawning and rubbing her eyes, making out that she had just woken up. She had had no desire to sleep, however, ever since they’d left.

“If you’d been at the ball,” said one of the sisters, “you wouldn’t have come back early either. A beautiful princess came. She was the most beautiful princess anyone had ever seen. She was very civil, and gave us some of her oranges and lemons.”

Cendrillon felt full of joy, and asked them the name of this princess. The sisters said that nobody knew her, not even the prince, who would give anything to know her name. Cendrillon smiled and said to them:

“So she was quite beautiful, hey? You can’t be happy that I’m not able to see her, surely? Mademoiselle Javotte, lend me your yellow dress that you wear every day.”

“Well really!” said Mademoiselle Javotte. “Lend my dress to a dirty cinder-arse like you – I’d have to be mad!”

Cendrillon wasn’t at all unhappy with this insult, and would have been quite embarrassed if her sister had lent her the dress.

The next day, the two sisters went to the ball. Cendrillon went too, but dressed even more nicely than the last time. The prince never left her side, and whispering sweet nothing constantly. Cendrillon never grew bored, and soon forgot what her godmother had told her: to return at the first stroke of midnight. Cendrillon thought it was only 11 o’clock. She got up and fled as nimbly as though she were a doe.

The prince followed, but wasn’t able to catch her. In her haste, Cendrillon lost one of her glass slippers, which the prince carefully gathered up.

Cendrillon arrived home, without her carriage, without her servants, and in her filthy rags. Nothing remained of her former splendour except for a single glass slipper, the partner of the one she had lost.

The guards at the palace gates were asked if they has seen a princess leave. They replied that they had seen no one, save for a young, scruffy girl who was more of a peasant than a princess.

When her sisters came home, Cendrillon asked them how the ball had been, and if the beautiful princess had been there. They said that she had, but that she had fled at the first stroke of midnight, so hurriedly that she had left one of her glass slippers behind, the most beautiful they’d ever seen. They told her that the prince had claimed it, and then searched for her for the rest of the night, and that he was surely madly in love with the princess who had lost the glass slipper.

They’d never said a truer word, because a few days later the prince proclaimed that he would marry the woman whose foot fit the glass slipper. It was tried on the feet of all the princesses, then all the duchesses, then on the whole court. But without success.

The slipper was brought to the home of the two sisters, who did all they could to squeeze into the glass slipper. But they couldn’t even get it past the heel.

Cendrillon, who was watching and recognise the slipper, laughed, “It would even fit me better than that!”

Her sisters only ridiculed her. The gentleman who was doing the fitting, looked at Cendrillon. Finding her quite beautiful, he said it was only fair, and he had orders to let all women try the slipper on.

He made Cendrillon sit down, and approached with the glass slipper. It fit her quite smoothly, and slipped on and off as though her feet were waxed.

Her sisters were quite astonished. Even more so when Cendrillon pulled out the other glass slipper. Then her godmother arrived. She tapped Cendrillon’s clothes with her magic wand, making her just as beautiful as the rest of them.

Her sisters immediately recognised her as the beautiful princess from the ball. They threw themselves at her feet, and begged her to forgive them for all the nasty things they had done to her.

Cendrillon made them get up, and gave them a hug. She said she forgave them, and hoped they would always be good friends.

Cendrillon was led to the prince, who found her more beautiful then ever. A few days later, they were married. Cendrillon, who was as good as she was beautiful, brought her sisters to live at the palace, and they were soon married to two great lords.